UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Member States owe United Nations over $3.3 billion as of 31 January; $1.4 billion owed to regular budget, $1.9 billion to peace-keeping and $11.7 million to International Tribunals.

* UNESCO strongly condemns "murderous" attacks on Algerian press; offers to help rebuild newspaper offices destroyed in car-bombing.

* Experts from 30 countries focus on increasing problem of illicit manufacture, traffic and abuse of amphetamine-type stimulants.

* Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy to discuss impact of energy use on atmosphere and potential of biomass.

* Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on Outer Space begins two-week session in Vienna; to focus on space debris threat and new uses for small satellites.

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As of 31 January, Member States owed the United Nations a total of over $3.3 billion, according to the latest update on the Organization's financial situation. Of that amount, $1.4 billion was for assessments to the regular budget and $1.9 billion was for peace-keeping operations. An additional $11.7 million was owed for the International Tribunals. Included in the figures for peace-keeping and the Tribunals are assessments of $293 million within the 30-day due period.

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The Director-General of the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Federico Mayor, today strongly condemned "murderous attacks" on Algerian press over the weekend. At least 18 people were killed and more than 50 injured, when a car-bomb exploded yesterday in front of the Tahar Djaout press centre in Algiers. The editor-in-chief of Le Soir d'Algerie reportedly died in the blast which destroyed the offices of several newspapers. On Saturday, another newsman was shot dead near Blida, south of Algiers.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

The bombing of the Tahar Djaout centre was a particularly vicious strike at the very symbol of the country's free press, Mr. Mayor said. The wholesale destruction and killing directed at Algeria's information channels must not discourage those who continued to carry out a mission vital to the public discourse in a democracy, he added, and offered UNESCO assistance to re-establish the centre.

Mr. Mayor also condemned the murder today of a Filipino journalist and human rights lawyer, Ferdinand Reyes, in Dipolog, Zamboanga Del Norte Province, 700 kilometres south of Manila. He encouraged all Member States to ensure free and secure working conditions for journalists.

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Experts from 30 countries began meeting in Vienna today to study the world's growing problem with the illicit manufacture, traffic and abuse of amphetamine-type stimulants. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs called for the five-day meeting which will try and identify the scope, nature and magnitude of the problem. According to a United Nations study, abuse of the stimulants could become greater than drugs of natural origin because of availability, cheap price, low risk and consumer preference.

The study, by the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), in consultation with the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), examines the licit use of the drugs and their spread to the illicit market. It acknowledges the difficulty of estimating the extent of abuse at the global level, due to a lack of uniform and comparable data. The experts hope to fill that information gap. The abuse of amphetamine-type stimulants appears to be spreading and in some places it is bypassing heroin and cocaine.

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The Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development will discuss the impact of energy use on the atmosphere and the potential of biomass during its second regular session which began at United Nations Headquarters today. Other topics include the efficient use of energy and materials and energy exploration in developing countries. Biomass, when produced efficiently, has many potential environmental and social benefits, including job creation, energy for rural communities in developing countries, improved land management and a reduction of carbon dioxide and sulphur levels.

A recent report of the Secretary-General examines the protection of the atmosphere from the effects of human energy and prevailing trends in energy use. It suggests strategies for mitigating and avoiding adverse impacts of possible climate change, as well as sustainable development policies to protect the atmosphere. According to another report, fossil fuels will dominate the energy needs of developed and developing countries well into the next century. Developing countries, already burdened with high oil import bills, will have

difficulty mobilizing capital to meet their energy requirements. Significant research and development will be needed to realize the enormous potential of renewable energy technologies in developing countries.

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The threat posed by space debris will a key focus of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, during its two-week session, which began in Vienna today. There is growing alarm at the hazards caused by defunct satellites and other fragments of objects in the crowded earth orbit, especially the added threat of collision with nuclear-powered space objects. The Subcommittee will review the latest scientific research on the problem and steps by space agencies to reduce the growth or damage potential of debris, as well as technical options for dealing with it.

The Subcommittee will also examine new uses for small, low-cost satellites, particularly for developing countries, in such fields as communications, earth resource monitoring, disaster warning and long-distance education. According to a recent report, such areas are ideal for extensive international cooperation and could involve countries with modest research budgets and little or no experience in space technology. The 61-member Subcommittee is the focal point of multilateral cooperation in space technology and research.

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